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## **2 Samuel 5:1-5**

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, 'Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.' So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

## **2 Samuel 5:9-10**

David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inwards. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

## **2 Corinthians 12:2-10**

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

## **Mark 6:1-13**

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Receiving Jesus or not

Today's reading includes two stories about those proclaiming the Kingdom of God not being welcomed or heard – first Jesus and then his disciples. Let's get into these and see what they might have to say to us today.

The first incident is in the synagogue – apparently in Nazareth though Mark just calls it Jesus' home town. He had been by the lake where he healed the woman and the local Synagogue leader's daughter and the walk up into the hills to get to Nazareth would have been about 40 km. In those days, Nazareth was a small, insignificant village, so Jesus was a 'small town boy'. The synagogue was probably the only place to hold a meeting in the village, and it would be natural to invite a visiting personality to speak—Jesus clearly has established a reputation by now. He had been teaching, healing the sick and casting out demons over much of the galilee district by then. And his disciples came with him and got to see how he was rejected even by those closest to him.

Once again those who heard him teach were astounded. But this time not because they were overwhelmed by his teaching or miracles and impressed but rather because they were filled with scorn. Where previously the disciples asked 'Who is this...?' in wonder, now the people ask 'Who is this?' in the sense of 'Who does he think he is?' He's just the carpenter!

A carpenter translates tekton – a person skilled with woodwork, building, perhaps carving with wood and stone, someone who was good with their hands. Yet they hear Jesus has the reputation of doing mighty works, deeds of power with his hands instead. Jesus as eldest son would have been expected to take over his father's business especially after his father died which would explain why his father was not mentioned. So the locals would know him well and would know the whole family. They mention Mary and the brothers by name – probably because by the time Mark was writing these were all well known in the Christian community. Paul mentions that Jesus' brothers were part of the Christian community in 1Cor 9:5 even though they obviously weren't really accepting Jesus and his mission at this time. And they took offence at him – the word is - in Greek - to be scandalized – the word used of Jesus being a

stumbling block - Even those who met Jesus in the flesh could stumble because of him.

Jesus then quotes a proverb, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' Rather like our own proverb, Familiarity breeds contempt. This is a warning to us. It is so easy to accept the words of a visiting speaker and to reject the same message from someone we know well. For his village neighbours it was hard to accept the ordinary actually being great. Even when people accept the teaching as great it is a choice to accept the person giving it.

And then Mark says Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Two things are important to us here.

- First, it is not that if those who come to him do not have 'enough' faith they won't be cured. This is unfortunately often used as an excuse for people not being healed when they are prayed for, as if it was their fault. After all, Jesus, the son of God, is not limited in his power. Everywhere else it says that when people come to him they are healed. What is happening here is that few people are coming to him to be healed or delivered. The offence most feel means that they don't come, they don't expect healing, they don't have faith for that so they don't ask to receive it. Offence is a stumbling block, a barrier to faith. Faith is being ready to receive the miracle available in Jesus. That is what the woman with the bleeding evidenced when she touched Jesus. She was reaching out to receive what was available and Jesus commended her for that faith. Coming to Jesus for help is a sufficient sign of faith in itself.
- The other point to make here is that Jesus does not impose himself where he is not welcome. These people stand face to face with Jesus; they have heard his teaching, and have heard of his remarkable miracles; yet they are allowed their astonishing unbelief. It appears that God is willing to limit the reach of his sovereignty to give room for human freedom, despite

the consequences. We'll see this reflected in what he says to his disciples when he sends them out next.

Jesus then continues to go about among the villages around this area, teaching where seemingly he was accepted. He then sends out the twelve to extend his ministry more widely.

Jesus had called the Twelve in Mark 3.13 to be with him, and now he calls them to be away from him, in fulfilment of the original intention (Mark 3.14). This is Jesus' consistent plan; he calls us close to him so that we can then go and be close to others, and bring the power and presence of Jesus to them. This is what it is to be a disciple of Jesus.

He sent them out 2 by 2. This may have been due to the requirement in Deuteronomy for two witnesses to agree for their testimony to be accepted as true or just because it is common sense to give each other encouragement and support as in Ecclesiastes 4 – 2 are better than 1. Later on in Mark tasks are done in twos as well and in Acts Paul goes out with a companion each time except to Athens – the one place where he does not end up establishing a community of faith.

He gives them a list of things to take or not. Taking a staff and wearing sandals would remind his hearers of the Passover instructions – what they took as they fled to begin their journey to the promised land. And wearing sandals reminds us of Paul's spiritual armour – being shod with the readiness to share the gospel of peace, and of Isaiah – How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news. Not wearing two tunics meant they didn't have the outer tunic or cloak which would keep them warm if they had to sleep outside. This along with not having money also meant they had to rely on the hospitality of those they met on the way. They had to trust in God's provision on their mission and not pick and choose where they were to stay for the greatest benefit.

Just as Jesus had shown them in his ministry, so too they too would be rejected by some and they were to shake the dust off their feet and move on if they, with their message, were not welcomed. It was a common rabbinical practice, to shake the dust from their feet when they had been outside the territory of Israel, so that nothing Gentile would pollute the Holy Land. Here though it is those who reject the message of the good news about Jesus and the kingdom who are accorded the status of Gentiles, in contrast to those who receive it who are now the true Israel. The people of God are already being redefined not in relation to the promised land but in relation to the promised messiah.

So they go around proclaiming as Jesus had that all should repent – turn from their present way of living and change what was wrong to what was right, their entire outlook and aims, to those of God’s Kingdom – and they demonstrated that right making Kingdom power in casting out demons and healing.

So here in these two accounts we find that the amazing teaching and miracles of Jesus do not on their own produce faith. Familiarity can breed contempt, even (perhaps especially) for those closest to Jesus. And if Jesus is refused, he will move on until he finds places where his demanding message of repentance and costly good news will be received. If all that was true for him, it will be true for his disciples—and yet they are to preach, deliver and heal just the same.

If we seek to follow Jesus, to be his disciples, we too will encounter those who do not receive the message. We will encounter those who take offence at us or at the message of costly repentance. Jesus demonstrated and told his disciples that the response to that is not to keep on trying –as we might be inclined to do. People may receive Jesus in their own time, as obviously his family did later. But we are instructed to move on until we encounter those who will listen and receive the good news, and who will turn their lives around as we have also been called to do.